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A

LETTER

From several Members of the Society for

Reformation of Manners.

To the Most Revered Father in God

THOMAS

H. Tenison D.D. nuper Bishop of Lincoln, &c

By Divine Providence,

LORD ARCH-BISHOP of *CANTERBURY.*

May it Please Your Grace,

THE several Prosecutions we have made against the Immorality and Prophaneness of the Stage, are a sufficient Proof of our Zeal for the Execution of Her Majesty's Declarations against Immorrality and Prophaneness. If we have of late been less Active in this Particular, it is because we found that Her Majesty had by publick Notice given Special Orders to the *Master of the Revels* to take care of those Irregularities. But since the Building of the Playhouse in the *Hay-Market*, it is grown a general Discourse, that the Management of the Company design'd for it, is to be in Mr. *Vanbrook*; the known Character of which Gentleman has very much alarm'd us, and a full consideration of which, has given us so warm a Concern for Her Majesty's Honour, as to inform Your Grace, whose Post and Degree in the Church and State give You so happy an Opportunity of giving Her Majesty an Account of these Reports. Tho' this be given out by both him and his Friends, yet we must suspect the Truth, because 'tis impossible that Her Majesty, who has Declared against Immorality and Prophaneness, and against those Crimes on the Stage, should Act so directly contrary to the End She proposed, as to commit the Management of a Stage to that very Man, who Debauch'd it to a degree beyond the Looseness of all former Times. Both the present Houses were Indicted, and found Guilty by the Court of *Queen's-Bench*, for the several obscene and prophane Expressions in the *Relapse*, *Provok'd Wife*, *False Friend*, and the rest of his Plays, in which he is not satisfied to reflect on the Teachers of the Christian Religion, but carries his Impious Fury as far as the *Church*, *Morality*, and *Religion* it self. Tho' there be not one of his Comedies (as he calls them) but is more remarkable for Irreligion than for Wit and Humour, yet the *Provok'd Wife* is his Master-piece in both, which made

made the Good and Pious Biſhop of *Gloceſter*, recommend the Author to Puniſhment in the Houſe of *Lords*; and he had certainly then been Stigmatiz'd, at leaſt, by a publick Cenſure of that Auguſt Aſſembly, had he not had the good Fortune to have a Friend that by an admirable Dexterity Warded the Blow, and Diverted the Storm from him which he ſo juſtly deſerv'd. If then the good Biſhop of *Glouceſter* with a Pious Zeal attack'd him for what was paſt, (and we hope almoſt forgot) how much more muſt we expect from Your *Grace*'s great and known Piety and Zeal, which will prompt you to inform Her Majeſty of what is carrying on without her Knowledge, ſo much to the Detriment of *Religion* and *Morality*. It was not the Biſhop of *Glouceſter* alone who was fired with Indignation againſt this Play of the *Provok'd Wife*, but the Judges themſelves having had it Play'd at the *Temple*, were ſo ſhock'd at it, that they oblig'd the Players to leave off in the Middle, and reſolv'd never to have a Play Acted there again.

Is then this Author a Man fit for the Government of a Playhouſe, whoſe Writings are in equal Abhorrence to the *Church* and the *State*? Shall he whom the Judges have Condemn'd to that degree, as to renounce the Diverſion for the Filth of his Play, be ſet at the Head, and Management of a Company. But that Your *Grace* may not think this Accuſation without Proof, we ſhall, inſtead of referring Your *Grace* to the Records in the Court of *Queen's-Bench*, give ſome few Particulars, for to Tranſcribe the whole, wou'd be to Tranſcribe moſt of what he has Writ.

In his Play call'd, The Provok'd Wife.

'But more than all that, you muſt know, I was afraid of being Damn'd in 'thoſe Days, for I kept ſneaking cowardly Company, Fellows that went to 'Church, and ſaid Grace to their Meat, and had not the leaſt Tincture of Qua-'lity about 'em.

'Damn 'em both with all my Heart, and every thing elſe that daggles a 'Pettycoat; except four generous Whores, with *Betty Sands* at the Head of 'em, 'who were Drunk with my Lord *Rake* and I, ten times in a Fortnight.

'Sure, if Woman had been ready Crea ted, the Devil inſtead of being kick'd 'down into Hell had been Married.

'Pox of my Family.

'Pox of her Vertue.

'He has Married me, and be damn'd to him.

'Pox of the Parſon.

'Damn Morality, and damn the Watch.

'Let me ſpeak and be damn'd. } *This is ſpoken by one in a*

'And you and your Wife may be damn'd. } *Miniſter's Habit.*

'Stand off and be damn'd.

'Damn me, if you han't.

'Lord! What Notions have we ſilly Women from theſe old Philoſophers of 'Vertue, for Vertue is this, and Vertue is that, and Vertue has its own Re-'ward; Vertue, Vertue is an Aſs, and a Gallant is worth Forty on't.

'If I ſhould play the Wife and Cuckold him.

'That wou'd be playing the downright Wife indeed.

'I know according to the ſtrict Statute Law of Religion, I ſhou'd do 'Wrong; but if there were a Court of Chancery in Heaven, I'm ſure I ſhou'd 'caſt him.

'If there were a Houſe of Lords you might.

'If you ſhould ſee your Miſtreſs at a Coronation, dragging her Peacock's 'Train, with all her State and Inſolence about her, it would ſtrike you with 'all the awful Thoughts that Heaven it ſelf could pretend to, from you.

'Madam,

'Madam, to oblige your Ladyſhip, he ſhall ſpeak Blaſphemy.
'In hopes thou'lt give me up thy Body, I reſign thee up my Soul.
'A Villain, but a repenting Villain, Stuff which Saints in all Ages have 'been made of.
'Satan and his Equipage; Woman tempted me, Luſt weakn'd me, and ſo 'the Devil overcame me; as fell *Adam*, ſo fell I.

In his Play call'd, The Relapſe.

'You can't take the Oaths, you're a *Jacobite*.
'Thou may'ſt as well ſay, I can't take Orders becauſe I'm an Atheiſt.
'But pray my Lord how do you diſpoſe of your ſelf on *Sundays*?
'Why faith Madam——*Sunday* is a vile Day I muſt confeſs. I intend to 'move for Leave to bring in a Bill, that the Players may work upon it as well 'as the Hackney-Coaches. Tho' this I muſt ſay for the Government, it 'leaves us the Churches to Entertain us, but then again, they begin ſo a-'bominably Early, a Man muſt riſe by Candle-light to get dreſs'd by the Pſalm.
'Pray which Church does your Lordſhip moſt oblige with your Preſence?
'Oh St. *James*'s, Madam,——there's much the beſt Company.
'Is there good Preaching too?
'Why faith Madam——I can't tell. A Man muſt have very little to do there 'that can give an account of the Sermon.
'You can give an Account of the Ladies?
'Or I deſerve to be Excommunicated.
'Alas my Lord, I'm the worſt Company in the World at Church, I am apt 'to mind the Prayers, or the Sermon, or——
'One is ſtrangely apt at Church to mind what one ſhould not do.
'Dear *Coupler*, what's to be done.
'Nothing's to be done till the Bride and Bridegroom come to Town.
'Bride and Bridegroom? Death and Fury, I can't bear that thou ſhould'ſt 'call 'em ſo.
'Why what ſhall I call them, Dog and Cat?
'Not for the World, that ſounds more like Man and Wife than the t'other.
'Well, if you'll hear of them in no Language, we'll leave them for the Nurſe 'and Chaplain——
'The Devil and the Witch.
'We muſt find what ſtuff they are made of, whether the Churchman be 'chiefly compoſed of the Fleſh or the Spirit, I preſume the former. For as 'Chaplains go, 'tis probable he eats three Pound of Beef to the reading of one 'Chapter, this gives him Carnal Deſires. He wants Money, Preferment, Wine, 'a Whore, therefore we muſt invite him to Supper, give him fat Capons, Sack 'and Sugar, a Purſe of Gold, and a plump Siſter.
'But his Worſhip overflows with his Bounty; he is not only pleaſed to for-'give us our Sins, but deſigns thou ſhalt ſquat thy ſelf down in a fat Gooſe 'living.
'Your Worſhip's Goodneſs is unſpeakable; yet there is one thing ſeems a 'Point of Conſcience, and Conſcience is a tender Babe. If I ſhould bind my 'ſelf for the ſake of this Living to Marry Nurſe, I doubt it may be look'd on 'as a kind of Symony.
'If it were Sacriledge the Living is worth it.

In his Comedy call'd, The Falſe Friend, 1702.

'Pox take ye. —— The Devil fetch me, *&c.*
'Heaven's Bleſſing muſt needs fall upon ſo dutiful a Son; but I don't know 'how its Judgments may deal with ſo Indifferent a Lover.

Say

‘ Say that ’tis true, you are Married to another, and that a —— ’Twou’d be ‘ a Sin to think of any Body but your Husband, and that —— You are of a ‘ timorous Nature, and afraid of being Damn’d.

‘ How have I Lov’d, to Heaven I appeal; but Heaven does now permit that ‘ Love no more.

‘ Why does it then permit us Life and Thought? Are we deceiv’d in its ‘ Omnipotence? Is it reduc’d to find its Pleaſure in its Creature’s Pain?

‘ *Leonora*’s Charms turn Vice to Vertue, Treaſon into Truth; Nature, who ‘ has made her the Supream Object of our Deſires muſt needs have deſign’d ‘ her the Regulator of our Morals.

‘ There he goes I’faith; he ſeem’d as if he had a Qualm juſt now; but he ne‘ ver goes without a dram of Conſcience-water about him to ſet Matters right ‘ again.

‘ Speak, or by all the Flame and Fire of Hell Eternal; ſpeak, or thou art dead.

The moſt abominable Obſcene Expreſſions which ſo frequently occur in his Plays (as if the principal Deſign of them was to gratifie the lewd and vicious part of the Audience,and to corrupt the virtuouſly diſpoſed)are in this black Collection wholly omitted. We are aſham’d to diſguſt Your *Grace*’s Eyes with ſuch Stuff that is not fit to Read. What then can recommend this Gentleman to ſuch a Poſt? No Religion, and much Aſſurance? But my Lord, Your *Grace* is too great an Example of Piety and Juſtice, to ſuffer Her Majeſty to be longer Ignorant of a Deſign ſo very Prejudicial to *Chriſtianity*, and the *Morality* of the whole Nation; which if ſhe knew, her Virtue and Piety wonld put a ſtop to our Fears and Apprehenſions.

We have diſcharged our Duty in putting it into Your *Grace*’s Hands to prevent ſo great a Miſchief to *Religion*. And we are entirely ſatisfied that by it we may be ſecure of having Her Majeſty acquainted with it, and by conſequence, theſe difficulties remov’d, by removing the Cauſe.

London, *December* 10*th*. 1704.

FINIS.